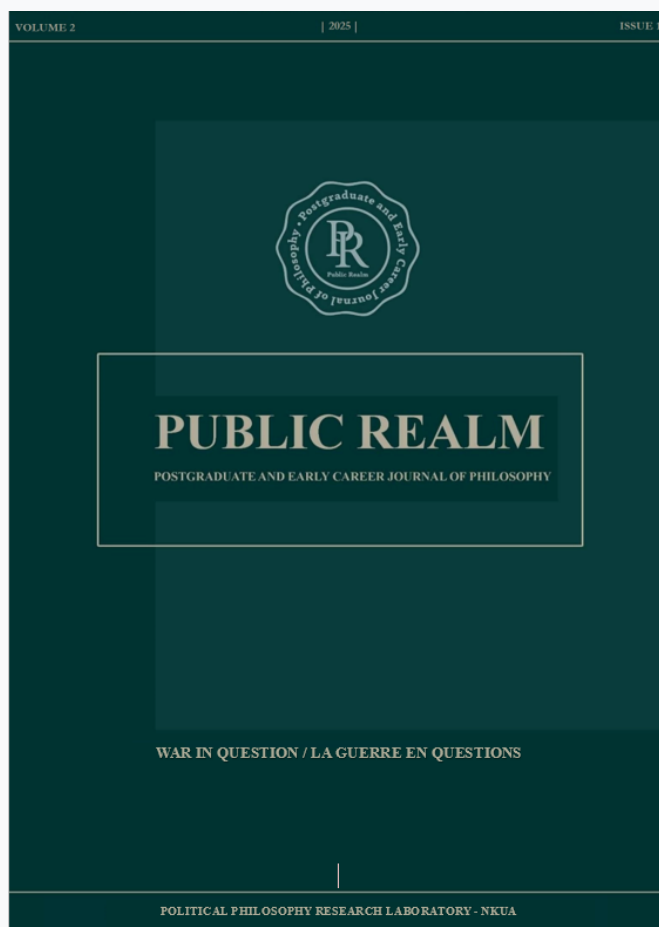


Public Realm. Postgraduate and Early Career Journal of Political Philosophy

Vol 2 (2025)

Public Realm



Does the Melian Dialogue serve as an emphatic continuation of Pericles' imperialist policy?

Stavros Anastasopoulos

doi: [10.12681/pr.v2.35535](https://doi.org/10.12681/pr.v2.35535)

To cite this article:

Anastasopoulos, S. (2025). Does the Melian Dialogue serve as an emphatic continuation of Pericles' imperialist policy? . *Public Realm. Postgraduate and Early Career Journal of Political Philosophy*, 2, 67–85.
<https://doi.org/10.12681/pr.v2.35535>

Does the Melian Dialogue serve as an emphatic continuation of Pericles' imperialist policy?"

Stavros Anastasopoulos

University of Athens

Abstract

This article¹ is divided into two parts: in the first part, I undertake the weighty task of interpreting the Melian Dialogue – the widely known conversation between the Athenians and the Melians, which took place in 416 B.C. – and then I shed light on the immorality that characterizes the views expressed by the Athenians. Athens seeks to conquer Melos by force, basing its decision on the necessity for Athenian hegemony to constantly expand its territorial borders. The second part of the paper examines the three speeches of Pericles – propounded by Thucydides – and attempts to prove that the Melian Dialogue acts as a faithful continuation of Pericles' imperialistic orations. In this way, it becomes evident that the Melian Dialogue is not just a circumstantial event, caused by the pain and suffering of the Peloponnesian War, but also represents a carefully considered expansionist policy put into practice by the Athenians over the years.

Keywords

Thucydides, Melian Dialogue, Pericles, Athenian Democracy, Athenian Imperialism, Peloponnesian War

¹ I am most grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback. Furthermore, my profound gratitude extends to Professor Dimitris Karadimas for his instrumental assistance.

Introductory Remarks

In March 416 B.C., the Athenians decided to invade and conquer Melos, a Greek island located in the Aegean Sea.² A similar military operation had been carried out by the Athenians ten years earlier, in 426 B.C., under the generalship of Nicias³ - the famous leader of the moderate faction - but Melos had shown great resistance, which proves that the Athenians did not always succeed when trying to impose their will on other cities. This time, the Athenians - known for their dogged determination, which often rescued them from various dangers or, on the contrary, got them into trouble - have once again decided to impose their leadership on Melos. Thucydides presents the dialogue between the Athenians and the Melians in a way that is largely reminiscent of the technique - namely, dialectic conversation - used by Plato in his works.⁴ Conversely, it could be argued that Thucydides represents the earliest example of this phenomenon. Therefore, if the historian was influenced by any literary genre, it would be tragedy, rather than the Platonic dialogues. In this paper I will attempt to prove that the Melos campaign is

² See Michael G. Seaman, "The Athenian Expedition to Melos in 416 B.C.", *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*^{4th Qtr.} 46, 1997, p. 386.

³ See Thuc. 3.91.1-3: *Τοῦ δ' αὐτοῦ θέρους οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι τριάκοντα μὲν ναῦς ἔστειλαν περὶ Πελοπόννησον, ὧν ἐστρατήγει Δημοσθένης τε ὁ Ἀλκισθένης καὶ Προκλῆς ὁ Θεοδώρου, ἐξήκοντα δὲ ἐς Μῆλον καὶ δισχιλίουσιν ὀπλίτας· ἐστρατήγει δὲ αὐτῶν Νικίας ὁ Νικηράτου. τοὺς γὰρ Μηλίους ὄντας νησιώτας καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλοντας ὑπακούειν οὐδὲ ἐς τὸ αὐτῶν συμμαχικὸν ἵνα ἔβούλοντο προσαγαγέσθαι. ὥς δὲ αὐτοῖς δηουμένης τῆς γῆς οὐ προσεχώρουν, ἄραντες ἐκ τῆς Μήλου αὐτοὶ μὲν ἐπλευσαν ἐς Ὠρωπὸν τῆς Γραικίης, ὑπὸ νύκτα δὲ σχόντες εὐθύς ἐπορεύοντο οἱ ὀπλίται ἀπὸ τῶν νεῶν πεζῇ ἐς Τάναγραν τῆς Βοιωτίας. οἱ δὲ ἐκ τῆς πόλεως πανδημεῖ Ἀθηναῖοι, Ἱππονίκου τε τοῦ Καλλίου στρατηγοῦντος καὶ Εὐρυμέδοντος τοῦ Θουκλέους, ἀπὸ σημείου ἐς τὸ αὐτὸ κατὰ γῆν ἀπήντων.*

⁴ See Colin W. Macleod, "Form and Meaning in the Melian Dialogue", *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*^{4thQtr.} 23, 1974, p. 389: "The Melian Dialogue is an ideal form of deliberation. It combines the practicality of the public speech with the precision of dialectic. It clearly defines its subject, it is based on the facts of the case, not on idle speculation, and it aims to do no more than what those facts allow off, to discover what is possible or expedient". For another feature of this dialogue that resembles Plato's form of writing see indicatively Daniel Boyarin, "Deadly Dialogue: Thucydides with Plato", *Representations* 117, 2012, p. 66-67: "The dialogue begins with a metacomment that is immediately reminiscent (to us) of the *incipets* of various Platonic dialogues, namely an explicit thematization of the form of the discourse. Just as in the *Symposium*, the *Gorgias*, the *Protagoras*, and the *Republic*, where Socrates insists on dialogue and not debate, refusing that the decision of right and wrong in the discussion be made by anyone else (the form of democracy), so too in the beginning of the Melian Dialogue, the Athenians refuse the Melians the opportunity to carry on a debate, in which each party would be able to express their own position at length, freely, and with full opportunity to express themselves". Furthermore, see Felix Martin Wassermann, "The Melian Dialogue", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 78, 1947, p. 19: "Like a scene in a tragedy, the Melian Dialogue belongs to the Thucydidean passages which, as Plutarch says (*Mor.* 347A), turn the reader into a spectator. It makes him witness history in action. Rationalistic scepticism and keen analysis have not impaired Thucydides' dramatic abilities". For the opposite view, see Panos Christodoulou, "Thucydides' Pericles. Between Historical Reality and Literary Representation", in A. Tsakmakis and M. Tamiolaki (ed.), *Thucydides Between History and Literature*, Berlin: De Gruyter 2013, p. 226: "The tendency, however, to underestimate the historical dimension of Thucydides' thought and to promote first and foremost the literary dimension of his work seems to disrespect the limits that the author himself poses in his venture". Cf. Simon Hornblower, *Θουκυδίδης. Ο Ἱστορικός και το Έργο του*, trans. A. Maniati (Athens: Tipothito, G. Dardanos 2003), p. 113. On Plato's dialogue form, see C. Emlyn-Jones, "Dramatic Structure and Cultural Context in Plato's *Laches*", *The Classical Quarterly* 49, 1999, p. 132.

nothing less than an emphatic continuation of the imperialist policy exerted by the great Pericles.

The reason for the Athenians' intense desire to subjugate Melos is more than obvious: the island was asserting its right to remain neutral during the Peloponnesian War.⁵ The Athenians, in turn, could not afford to allow other cities to remain uninvolved during the catastrophic war, and, thus, demanded from them an alliance (this is the positive scenario) or a declaration of submission (this is the worst scenario).⁶ In any case, the reader is expected to experience discomfiture due to the fact that Thucydides makes a very abrupt and "cold" introduction to this historical episode by using the neutral phrase *καὶ ἐπὶ Μῆλον τὴν νῆσον Ἀθηναῖοι ἐστράτευσαν*. In other words, the historian, by offering this statement, wishes to create an evocative representation of the Athenians' arrogance;⁷ the city of Athens was known for making spontaneous decisions (their attitude is perfectly described by the use of the prosthetic conjunction *καί*), something that resembles the way immature children usually act. The actions implemented by the Athenians, however, could potentially negatively affect the lives of thousands of people.⁸ War, of course, is cruel and relentless and Thucydides acknowledged this better than anyone else, thanks to his exceptional ability to observe and describe human nature from both a sociological and philosophical perspective.⁹ Therefore, while the conquest of Melos is, seemingly, an

⁵ Moreover, Thucydides informs us that Melos was a colony of the Lacedaemonians and the inhabitants of the island did not wish to become subjects of the Athenians. See Thuc. 5.84.2. See also Seaman, "The Athenian Expedition to Melos in 416 B.C.", *ibid.*, p. 390 and George Bornstein, "Reading Thucydides in America Today", *The Sewanee Review* 123, 2015, p. 664-665. We should also keep in mind that in the Platonic *Apology* (31e-32a) Socrates points out that whoever takes action for the common good will not only fail but his life will also be put in danger.

⁶ Martha Elena Venier, "De Pericles A Sicilia", *Foro Internacional* 51, 2011, p. 361: "Pero en lo que se conoce como el diálogo de Melos -párrafos 85-113 del libro quinto- hay un ejemplo no despreciable de lo que se podía ganar o perder cuando en nombre de la democracia se buscaba colonizar. Los atenienses procuraban alianza o vasallaje en esa isla al sur del Peloponeso, partidaria de los lacedemonios, pero neutral. El argumento básico de los atenienses se sustentaba en que si los melios aceptaban el vasallaje, que en esencia significaba pagar tributo, no habría necesidad de dominarlos por otros medios y de esa manera les evitaban el trabajo de destruirlos. Las alternativas no eran favorables para los melios, que descartaron cualquier trato. En el último asedio de los atenienses, a quienes favoreció la traición, los melios capitularon y, cuenta Tucídides, "los atenienses ejecutaron a todos los melios en edad viril que cayeron en sus manos, redujeron a esclavitud a niños y mujeres, y enviaron luego quinientos de sus colonos para poblar la ciudad".

⁷ A similar view to mine is expressed by Connor, who notes that the narrative begins almost randomly, but its subsequent development demonstrates the importance of this historical episode, which Thucydides wants to emphasize. See Robert Connor, *Θουκυδίδης*, trans. P. Daouti (Athens: Gutenberg 2022), p. 251-252.

⁸ The Athenians' hasty decision in 427 B.C. to slaughter all adult Mytilenaeans and turn women and children into slaves serves as an indicative example of the Athenians' reckless actions (Cleon, of course, contributed significantly to this outcome, since at that time he exerted a major influence on the Athenian Assembly thanks to his grandiloquence). The next day, though, the Athenians, having apparently felt remorse, revoke their decision, proving in fact that they are not heartless and can, at times, behave with leniency. This incident proves that war kindles passions in the hearts of men, corrupts their souls and forces them to behave recklessly and under the destructive influence of panic. W. Liebeschuetz, "The Structure and Function of the Melian Dialogue", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 88, 1968, p. 73-74 discovers a hermeneutic link between the Melian Dialogue and Cleon's harsh attitude towards Mytilene.

⁹ See Williamson Murray, "Thucydides: Theorist of War", *Naval War College Review* 66, 2013, p. 30.

insignificant episode included in a destructive war that lasted approximately twenty-seven years, nevertheless in reality it shows vividly the new mores prevailing in Athens at that time: the Athenians conquering other cities by force, and validating the views expressed by Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*¹⁰ or those of Callicles presented in Plato's *Gorgias*.¹¹ Above all, however, the Athenians put into practice (whether they realize it or not) the proclamations of Pericles. Thirteen years after the death of the renowned politician - who had fallen ill but failed to recover due to the disastrous plague¹² that struck Athens - Pericles' words were still deeply engraved in the hearts of the Athenians. This even led to the comic poet Eupolis making use of an extremely apt simile, according to which Pericles was such a talented and eloquent orator, that he was able to enchant his listeners and seduce

¹⁰ See P. P. Nicholson, "Unravelling Thrasymachus' Arguments in 'The Republic'", *Phronesis* 19, 1974, p. 210-232; George F. Hourani, "Thrasymachus' Definition of Justice in Plato's 'Republic'", *Phronesis* 7, 1962, p. 110-120; Joseph P. Maguire, "Thrasymachus - or Plato?", *Phronesis* 16, 1971, p. 142-163; A. G. N. Flew, "Responding to Plato's Thrasymachus", *Philosophy* 70, 1995, p. 436-447; Demetrius, J. Hadgopoulos, "Thrasymachus and Legalism", *Phronesis* 18, 1973, p. 204-208; I. H. Jang, "Socrates' Refutation of Thrasymachus", *History of Political Thought* 18, 1997, p. 189-206; Shmuel Harlap, "Thrasymachus's Justice", *Political Theory* 7, 1979, p. 347-370; E. L. Harrison, "Plato's Manipulation of Thrasymachus", *Phoenix* 21, 1967, p. 27-39; F. E. Sparshott, "Socrates and Thrasymachus", *The Monist* 50, 1966, p. 421-459; G. J. Boter, "Thrasymachus and Πλεονεξία", *Mnemosyne*^{Fourth Series} 39, 1986, p. 261-281; J. R. S. Wilson, "Thrasymachus and the Thumos: A Further Case of Prolepsis in Republic I", *The Classical Quarterly* 45, 1995, p. 58-67; Georgios N. Bebedelis, *Monism and dualism in Plato and the platonic tradition*, diss. (Athens: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens 2023), p. 25 and W. A. Welton, "Thrasymachus Vs Socrates: What Counts as a Good Answer to the Question 'What is Justice'?", *Apeiron* 39, 2006, p. 293-318.

¹¹ See, for example, George Klosko, "The Refutation of Callicles in Plato's 'Gorgias'", *Greece & Rome* 31, 1984, p. 126-139; Rod Jenks, "The Sounds of Silence: Rhetoric and Dialectic in the Refutation of Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*", *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 40, 2007, p. 201-215; Scott Berman, "Socrates and Callicles on Pleasure", *Phronesis* 36, 1991, p. 117-140; George B. Kerferd, "Plato's Treatment of Callicles in the 'Gorgias'", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*^{New Series} 20, 1974, p. 48-52; Joseph Patrick Archie, "Callicles' Redoubtable Critique of the Polus Argument in Plato's 'Gorgias'", *Hermes* 112, 1984, p. 167-176; Devin Stauffer, "Socrates and Callicles: A Reading of Plato's 'Gorgias'", *The Review of Politics* 64, 2002, p. 627-657; and Kyriakos Katsimanis, "Ο πλατωνικός Καλλικλής υπό το φως του Θουκυδίδη", in M. Skortsis (ed.), *Γ' Διεθνές Συμπόσιο για τον Θουκυδίδη: Δημηγορίες*, Athens: Sideris I. 2006, p. 80-101.

¹² The deadly plague that struck Athens not only had a negative impact on the well-being of the Athenian citizens, but also proved that human psychology is inextricably linked to health. The Athenians lost their minds, behaved unreasonably and went literally mad, since they were dying one after another. The phrase *ἄποροι καθεστηκότες* (Thucydides means that the Athenians did not know how to react) used by the historian at 2.59.2 vividly describes the Athenians' despair. After experiencing the devastating pandemic of COVID-19 in modern times, we can now, at least to some extent, share the despair felt by the Athenians. But let us not forget that at that time medicine was not at the high scientific level it is today. For the Athenian plague in general, see W. P. MacArthur, "The Athenian Plague: A Medical Note", *The Classical Quarterly* 4, 1954, p. 171-174; Donald A. Nielsen, "Pericles and the Plague: Civil Religion, Anomie, and Injustice in Thucydides", *Sociology of Religion* 57, 1996, p. 400-403; Dennis L. Page, "Thucydides' Description of the Great Plague at Athens", *The Classical Quarterly* 3, 1953, p. 97-119; Herbert Newell Couch, "Some Political Implications of the Athenian Plague", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 66, 1935, p. 92-103; E. M. Craik, "Thucydides on the Plague: Physiology of Flux and Fixation", *The Classical Quarterly* 51, 2001, p. 102-108 and Lisa Kallet, "Thucydides, Apollo, The Plague, And The War", *The American Journal of Philology* 134, 2013, p. 355-359.

them with his tongue, in a way reminiscent of bees that use their sting as a weapon.¹³

The Arguments Posed by the Athenians in the Melian Dialogue

First of all, it is necessary to point out that the dialogue between the Athenians and the Melians takes place in a private context and not before the people, i. e. the inhabitants of Melos. In short, the Athenians send ambassadors to represent them in the diplomatic debate, while the Melians invite these ambassadors to present the official positions of Athens in front of their rulers. The Athenians, in their turn, who have vast experience in handling diplomatic affairs, immediately recognize the dishonest motives of the Melians, pointing out that the latter present the Athenians before a few elite figures of authority, because they are well aware of the Athenian tradition in rhetoric. Therefore, the Melians assume that if the Athenians are given the opportunity to speak before a crowd, then victory in the matter under discussion will be theirs, since they will easily impose their views on the audience thanks to their ability to persuade whomever they wish to.¹⁴ It is widely known that the Athenians were extremely articulate thanks to the ceaseless exposure to the art of rhetoric afforded them by their firmly grounded direct democracy. The Melians respond without hesitation (thus proving that they are aware of the predicament they are facing) that the outcome of the dialogue seems to be predetermined: if they refuse to succumb to the wishes of the Athenians, then this will undeniably be a *casus belli*, whereas if they finally give in, they will become slaves of Athens. The Athenians, outraged by the temporary turn of events, threaten to withdraw from the debate and claim that what the Melians suppose is merely speculation about the future. In fact, we can clearly observe a rhetorical trick that aims to present the Athenians as supposedly benevolent and impartial (if I have a flair for rhetoric, it means that I am capable of deceiving my interlocutor). The Melians inevitably fall into the trap and agree to conduct the dialogue in the way the Athenians have just proposed.

The Athenians begin the development of their arguments with a famous and shockingly immoral notion, according to which justice becomes a matter of discussion when the two interlocutors are equal in power; by contrast, when one of the two cities possesses greater military (or naval) force, then the dominant one must prevail and the weaker one must obey without question.¹⁵ For most scholars, this phrase serves as a “paradigm of

¹³ See Eur. Fr. 102 K.-A. = 94 K.: (A.) κράτιστος οὗτος ἐγένετ' ἀνθρώπων λέγειν· / ὁπότε παρέλθοι <δ'>, ὥσπερ ἀγαθοὶ δρομῆς / ἐκ δέκα ποδῶν ἥρει λέγων τοὺς ῥήτορας. / (B.) ταχὺν λέγεις γε. (A.) πρὸς δέ <γ'> αὐτοῦ τῷ τάχει / πειθῶ τις ἐπεκάθιζεν ἐπὶ τοῖς χείλεσιν, / οὕτως ἐκίλει καὶ μόνος τῶν ῥητόρων / τὸ κέντρον ἐγκατέλειπε τοῖς ἀκρωμένοις.

¹⁴ See Thuc. 5.85.

¹⁵ See Thuc. 5.89.1: τὰ δυνατὰ δ' ἐξ ὧν ἑκάτεροι ἀληθῶς φρονοῦμεν διαπράσσεσθαι, ἐπισταμένους πρὸς εἰδότας ὅτι δίκαια μὲν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρωπείῳ λόγῳ ἀπὸ τῆς ἴσης ἀνάγκης κρίνεται, δυνατὰ δὲ οἱ προύχοντες πράσσουν καὶ οἱ ἀσθενεῖς συγχωροῦσιν. The reader comes to grips with the idea that Thucydides is not accidentally considered by political scientists as the founder of the realism that prevails in international relations. Do modern states operate in a different way? See Jonathan Monten, “Thucydides and Modern Realism”, *International Studies Quarterly* 50, 2006, p. 3: “Captivated by the methodological and substantive nature of Thucydides' initial contention of a “truest cause” based on “the facts themselves,”

imperial brutality”.¹⁶ As I will reveal below, this tactic of the Athenians is not a revolutionary method, but part of a wider rhetorical tradition that goes back in time and is directly linked to Pericles. The Melians, however, take care to set the necessary limits to the dialogue from the beginning and warn the Athenians that it is imprudent to behave in this way, because, should they ever be defeated in battle, their opponent will show no mercy at all and will punish them with the same severity with which they tend to impose their views on the rest of the Greek cities.¹⁷ The scholar of Thucydides immediately notices here that this warning acts as a foreshadowing of the disastrous defeat that the Athenians will soon experience in Sicily. The historian alerts the reader accordingly by implicitly telling him that the Athenians will soon suffer the same injustices they have committed in the past.¹⁸ The universe tends to bring everyone back to order when they overstep their boundaries. In short, life is no different from philosophy: every argument (or every situation) is overturned by a new one (or a new reality), and this process goes on forever.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the Athenians, undeterred by the warnings of the Melians, respond with greater arrogance,²⁰ pointing out clearly that they are not worried about the possible destruction of their hegemony;²¹ the

modern realists and their critics have debated the appropriation of Thucydides as the founder of a continuous line of realist thought, with nothing less at stake than the historical credibility such a patron scholar entails. As Stephen Walt (2002) writes in a recent review of realist research, “the realist tradition has a distinguished lineage, including the works of Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Friedrich Meinecke, Carr, and Morgenthau.” Robert Gilpin (1986:306) writes that “in my judgment, there have been three great realist writers; it is difficult for me to conceive that anyone would deny them inclusion in the tradition. They are Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Carr”.

¹⁶ I am borrowing the phrase from A. B. Bosworth, “The Humanitarian Aspect of the Melian Dialogue”, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113, 1993, p. 30.

¹⁷ See Thuc. 5.90. See also Emily Greenwood, *Ο Θουκυδίδης και η Διαμόρφωση της Ιστορίας*, trans. P. Chiotellis (Athens: Kardamitsa 2011), p. 55-56.

¹⁸ As Donald Lateiner, “Nicias’ Inadequate Encouragement (Thucydides 7.69.2)”, *Classical Philology* 80, 1985, p. 206 puts it: “The nature of the Athenian’s encouragement illustrates the enemy’s assertion: Nicias and his troops are in a state of ἀπόνοια, desperate disregard of calculation, resulting from their circumstances (7.67.4). Gone is the πρόνοια of Pericles or Themistocles’ ability to improvise as needed (αὐτοσχεδιάζειν τὰ δέοντα). Nicias appeals to the specious terms that the Athenians at Melos had recently declared to be irrelevant to power and conducive to avoidable disasters (5.89, 111.3). He embodies the rhetoric of conventional values and nostalgia for the code of the heroic defender – although, ironically, he is the aggressor. Such arguments in Thucydides always signify impending disaster for the pleader, as here. His explicit criticism of Nicias here suggests disapproval of other speakers in his work who employ similar, traditional arguments. Men apply noble concepts *in extremis*, when no alternative is evident. The strategy of the fair-sounding phrase reveals desperation in Thucydides’ *History*, as consideration of the similarly desperate plights of the Plataeans and the Melians makes clear. All lean on Hellenic custom and law, ancestors and their accomplishments, the gods, hope and fortune, and, finally, the possibility of deliverance, simple survival. These men perish miserably. Their histories exemplify that suffering and disturbance to which Thucydides alerted the reader from the beginning (1.1.2, 23.1-3). Moralistic rhetoric in war is futile”.

¹⁹ For a philosophical elaboration of this argument, see Stavros Chr. Anastasopoulos, *Φιλοσοφικές Καταθέσεις* (Athens: Pyrinos Kosmos Publications 2021), p. 43. Cf. Jean Sykoutris, *Εκλογή Έργων* (Athens: Kaktos Publications 1997), p. 539.

²⁰ See Alker R. Hayward, Jr., “The Dialectical Logic of Thucydides’ Melian Dialogue”, *The American Political Science Review* 82, 1988, p. 806, who uses the phrase “moral cynicism” to describe the Athenians’ behavior.

²¹ See Cornelius Castoriadis, *Η Ελληνική Ιδιαιτερότητα, τόμ. Γ΄. Θουκυδίδης, η Ισχύς και το Δίκαιο*, trans. Z. Castoriadi (Athens: Kritiki 2011), p. 61-62.

Lacedaemonians, being rulers themselves, are lenient towards the defeated. More dangerous, on the contrary, are the Athenians' subjects, who thirst for revenge and want to completely destroy their oppressors. The Athenian ambassadors add that they have come to Melos in order to act in the interests of the Athenian hegemony and wish to rule Melos without causing any collateral damage.²² In essence, what the Athenians are saying is: "Surrender and we will not harm you". Indeed, it is evident that war turns powerful cities into voracious beasts. This means that the virtuous are often led to their demise, while the unscrupulous tend to survive. The Athenians, then, conclude that any mercifulness will be perceived as a sign of weakness by the other cities, which will rebel against Athens when the first opportunity arises.²³ Of course, we have every compelling reason to completely disavow the Athenian arguments on a human level, but these evaluations are extremely applicable in the military field, while simultaneously they interpret, in a philosophical way, the state of human psychology during a war.

Moreover, the Athenians argue that the conquest of Melos will enhance the security of the Athenian hegemony, which draws its advantages from the domination of the sea. The Athenians, being *θαλασσοκράτορες*,²⁴ are obliged to conquer the other islands in order to increase their naval power.²⁵ The Melians, however, are willing to risk everything and we cannot help but acknowledge their bravery. The Athenians, in contrast, try to put them in their place, presenting the view that the struggle is unequal, and those who trust in hope usually lunge towards their own disaster.²⁶ At this point, we can discern once again a foreshadowing of future events, as the Athenians underestimate those who resort to uncertain estimations and oracles; nevertheless, they are not in a position to predict that later on the general Nicias will not avoid falling into the same psychological trap during the Sicilian campaign.²⁷ Thucydides emerges as an extraordinary writer, since these pensive remarks are reminiscent of the artistic ingenuity under the influence of which the great poets of Athens, such as Aeschylus and Sophocles,

²² See Thuc. 5.91.1-2.

²³ See Thuc. 5.95.

²⁴ See, for example, John Nash, "Sea Power in the Peloponnesian War", *Naval War College Review* 71, 2018, p. 123: "The strategy of Pericles was an evolution of the strategy developed by those who had come before him, back to Themistocles and the Persian Wars. Thucydides sees Themistocles as the one who spurred Athens into becoming a sea power, thereby laying the foundations of the Athenian empire. This was because Themistocles in 478 had the Athenians rebuild their city walls, as well as the long walls connecting the city to the town and port of Piraeus. He allegedly advised the Athenians that if they were ever to find themselves hard pressed by land, they should go down to Piraeus and defy the world with their fleet. Before the battle of Salamis in 480, a Corinthian delegate attacked Themistocles's counsel, dismissing him because Athens had been evacuated and thus he did not even have a city to his name. Themistocles replied that not only did he have a city, but he had one even greater than the Corinthians—so long as the Athenians had 250 ships fully manned. Athens's decision to rebuild the city's walls caused anxiety in Sparta, although it was Sparta's allies that allegedly instigated the Spartans to confront Athens, because they feared the Athenian navy and the valor the Athenians had displayed against Persia. It is noteworthy that Thucydides maintains that it was Sparta's allies who were most concerned, for these allies were nearer to the coast than Sparta itself, and therefore more vulnerable to Athenian sea power. Plutarch put it bluntly in his biography of Themistocles, writing that he "fastened the city to the Piraeus and the land to the sea".

²⁵ See Thuc. 5.97-99.

²⁶ See Thuc. 5.100-103.

²⁷ See Thuc. 7.50.4.

composed their tragedies. Every distinguished thinker tends to be able to vividly depict in their work the tragedy of human existence itself.

The Athenians conclude their argument by emphatically stating that what they proclaim to be universally verified is closely intertwined with a natural law inherited from their ancestors, according to which the strong have a duty to rule the weak. At the same time, they imply that the Melians are acting with hypocrisy, since, if Melos possessed the hegemony, it would treat its allies with similar brutality.²⁸ Thucydides implies that humans tend to kill each other in the same way and for much the same reasons that lions maul zebras: due to the irresistible power of natural instinct. On the other hand, one might contend that natural instinct is an anachronistic notion and a lion's killing for food does not seem to be the same as human imperialism and the will to unlimited hegemony. Finally, a little further on, the Athenians fall unintentionally into an apparent contradiction, as they believe that the strong should not yield to the mighty, whereas the weak are under obligation to submit to the claims of the strong.²⁹ The Athenians forget, of course, that when they were called upon to face the Persians,³⁰ despite being powerless, they did not surrender but fought to the death for their freedom. The fact that the Athenians are now calling on the Melians to do the opposite of what they themselves did in the past proves that Athens is drunk with its excessive power and will soon lose everything.³¹ Consequently, the fate of Melos is now sealed: the Athenians will kill all the adults and enslave the women and children.³² This time someone like the conservative orator Diodotus, who could possibly prevent them from killing innocent people, is unfortunately absent.

Pericles as the “New Founder” of Athenian Imperialism

I shall begin the development of this chapter by explaining why I place the phrase “new founder” in quotation marks: in fact, Pericles does not invent the idea of controlling the sea, but rediscovers it, since Athens' tradition in naval warfare is immense and stretches all the way back to Themistocles³³ and even further back to Agamemnon or the king of Crete Minos.³⁴ Scholars

²⁸ See Thuc. 5.105.1-3.

²⁹ See Thuc. 5.111.4.

³⁰ See Ioannis M. Konstantakos, “La campagna di Serse contro la Grecia: mito poetico e pensiero storico, da Eschilo a Erodoto”, in G. E. Manzoni (ed.), *Il mito, il sacro, la patria dei poeti. Le radici identitarie dell'Europa a 2500 anni dalle guerre persiane*, Milano: Edizioni Studium 2021, p. 62-94.

³¹ See Dion. Hal. *On Thuc.* 39: βασιλεῦσι γὰρ βαρβάροις ταῦτα πρὸς Ἕλληνας ἤρμωττε λέγειν· Ἀθηναίοις δὲ πρὸς τοὺς Ἕλληνας, οὓς ἡλευθέρωσαν ἀπὸ τῶν Μήδων, οὐκ ἦν προσήκοντα εἰρῆσθαι, ὅτι τὰ δίκαια τοῖς ἴσοις ἐστὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους, τὰ δὲ βίαια τοῖς ἰσχυροῖς πρὸς τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς.

³² See Thuc. 5.116.4.

³³ See Timothy W. Burns, “The Problematic Character of Periclean Athens”, in G. C. Kellow and N. Leddy (ed.), *On Civic Republicanism. Ancient Lessons for Global Politics*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2016, p. 16. For Themistocles as an architect of the Athenian Empire, see S. N. Jaffe, “Walls of Wood and Walls of Stone: Themistocles as Architect of Empire”, in N. Marinatos and R. K. Pitt (ed.), *Thucydides the Athenian*, Athens: Alexandria Publications 2022, p. 19-46.

³⁴ See Herodot. 3.122.2: Πολυκράτης γὰρ ἐστὶ πρῶτος τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν Ἑλλήνων ὃς θαλασσοκρατέειν ἐπενοήθη, πάρεξ Μίνωός τε τοῦ Κνωσίου καὶ εἰ δὴ τις ἄλλος πρότερος τούτου ἦρξε τῆς θαλάσσης· τῆς δὲ ἀνθρωπίνης λεγομένης γενεῆς Πολυκράτης πρῶτος, ἐλπίδας πολλὰς ἔχων Ἰωνίης τε καὶ νήσων ἄρξειν.

rightly give Pericles credit for establishing a truly radical democracy that increased the political rights of the Athenian citizens and drastically improved their quality of life.³⁵ However, Xanthippus' son also made a significant contribution to Athens' foreign policy. In this chapter I will analyze elements of Pericles' three rhetorical speeches - these orations survive through Thucydides - which prove that the Melian Dialogue stands as a precise continuation of Pericles' war policy. Of course, this by no means implies that the politicians of the period during which the Melian Dialogue takes place are consciously copying Pericles' tactics; what is in fact happening is that the Athenians of 416 B.C. continue to apply unconsciously - although with great dedication - Pericles' proclamations. Besides, De Romilly³⁶ has proven in her doctoral thesis that Athenian imperialism was not a temporary event, but a policy that was faithfully put into practice over a long period of time. In short, domestic politics caused intense disagreements among the Athenians, but foreign policy was an occasion for common action. One need only recall Nicias' unsuccessful campaign against Melos in 426 B.C. (Nicias was the leader of the conservative party) and then expound the views expressed by Pericles in his speeches (Pericles was the leader of the democratic party). When circumstances called for it, the Athenians were as united as a fist. In short, the leaders of radical democracy (Pericles, Cleon, Alcibiades etc.) often disagreed with the conservative politicians (Nicias, Laches etc.), and each party promoted different ways of governing Athens, but on the contrary when foreign policy was the main item on the agenda, these ideological factions used to act in solidarity with each other, in order for them to be able to protect their precious *ἀρχή*.

Pericles' first speech (Thuc. 1.139.4-1.145) was delivered in 431 B.C. The Lacedaemonians and their allies have already decided to declare war against the Athenians and, thus, during this period of time they send many embassies to Athens making various claims, which, if realized, will supposedly prevent the outbreak of war. Pericles' speech represents a dynamic response to the demands of Sparta. At the beginning of his speech, the son of Agariste points out that the Athenians must not in any way preserve their territorial acquisitions under the influence of fear. The great politician adds that the Lacedaemonians are trying to impose their views on the Athenians in an authoritarian way: therefore, the Athenians should shout "no" and prepare for battle.³⁷ Pericles' dynamic attitude - the Athenians are rulers and cannot take orders from others - may have led Thucydides³⁸ and Aristophanes³⁹ to believe that the son of Xanthippus was pushing the Athenians towards war. Moreover, Pericles expresses the opinion that sea dominant cities enjoy huge

³⁵ Edward M. Harris, "Pericles' Praise of Athenian Democracy Thucydides 2.37.1", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 94, 1992, p. 164.

³⁶ See Jacqueline de Romilly, *Ο Θουκυδίδης και ο Αθηναϊκός Ιμπεριαλισμός. Η Σκέψη του Ιστορικού και η Γένεση του Έργου*, trans. L. Stefanou (Athens: Papadimas 2000²), p. 147-322.

³⁷ See Thuc. 1.141.1: αὐτόθεν δὴ διανοήθητε ἢ ὑπακούειν πρὶν τι βλαβῆναι, ἢ εἰ πολεμήσομεν, ὥσπερ ἔμοιγε ἄμεινον δοκεῖ εἶναι, καὶ ἐπὶ μεγάλῃ καὶ ἐπὶ βραχείᾳ ὁμοίως προφάσει μὴ εἶχοντες μὴδὲ ξὺν φόβῳ ἔχοντες ἃ κεκτήμεθα· τὴν γὰρ αὐτὴν δύναται δούλωσιν ἢ τε μεγίστη καὶ ἐλαχίστη δικαίωσις ἀπὸ τῶν ὁμοίων πρὸ δίκης τοῖς πέλας ἐπιτασσομένη.

³⁸ See Thuc. 1.127.3: ὦν γὰρ δυνατώτατος τῶν καθ' ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἄγων τὴν πολιτείαν ἡναντιοῦτο πάντα τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις, καὶ οὐκ εἶα ὑπέικειν, ἀλλ' ἐς τὸν πόλεμον ὥρμα τοὺς Ἀθηναίους.

³⁹ See Ar. *Acharn.* 531: ἦστραπτ' ἐβρόντα ξυνεκύκα τὴν Ἑλλάδα.

military advantages, and maintains that if Athens were an island then no nation in the world would have been able to conquer it.⁴⁰ For this reason, the well reputed politician urges his fellow citizens to evacuate their homes and gather behind the city walls; this is Pericles' famous defensive strategy,⁴¹ according to which the Athenians ought to leave the countryside exposed to the Lacedaemonians in order to be able to hit the enemy with their naval power (a similar plan was conceived by Themistocles when he proposed that the naval battle should be carried out at Salamis; again, Pericles is re-inventing the Athenian tradition). Pericles stresses that it is not the lifeless stones that matter, but people and their capacity for action. However, Pericles' obsession with war may have led to the outbreak of the plague (the crowding of citizens within confining walls, one could argue, may lead to the spread of viruses, which lead to serious or even fatal health problems).

Pericles' second speech - the famous Funeral Oration, Thuc. 2.34.8-2.46.2 - is usually praised for its democratic virtues and is considered by scholars as an eternal hymn to democracy,⁴² written at a time when most thinkers and literati espouse moderate or even anti-democratic views. However, if we study the text carefully, we will discover that the idea of Athenian imperialism is still evident.⁴³ Pericles argues that the Athenians inherited their hegemony from their ancestors and then took care to strengthen and broaden its scope, thus ensuring self-sufficiency for the Athenian citizens. The reader is, of course, in awe of the fact that Pericles

⁴⁰ See Thuc. 1.143.5: μέγα γὰρ τὸ τῆς θαλάσσης κράτος. σκέψασθε δέ· εἰ γὰρ ἦμεν νησιῶται, τίνες ἂν ἀληπτότεροι ἦσαν;

⁴¹ See Gustav Adolf Lehmann, *Perikles. Staatsmann und Stratege im klassischen Athen* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck 2008), p. 224: "Für Perikles, der als Jugendlicher die zweimalige Evakuierung von ganz Attika vor dem Angriff der persischen Armee miterlebt hatte und danach an dem Wiederaufbau Athens und dem raschen Aufstieg der Polis zu ungeahnter Größe aktiv beteiligt gewesen war, mochte diese sehr rationale und distanzierte Sicht unproblematisch erscheinen. Dabei konnten freilich dem ersten Mann über seiner in militärischer wie politischer Hinsicht folgerichtigen Konzeption die emotionalen und massenpsychologischen Komponenten innerhalb eines so elementar in alle Lebensverhältnisse einschneidenden Kriegsgeschehens leicht aus dem Blick geraten. Auf die Mehrheit der attischen Bürger, die bis dahin auf dem Lande lebte, und insbesondere auf die Jugend, die noch keine Kriegs- und Notzeiten gesehen hatte, sollte jedenfalls von der Zerstörung der heimischen Wohnstätten und der Verwüstung der Felder und Baumpflanzungen in Attika durch die peloponnesischen Invasoren, allen große Schockwirkung ausgehen, der sich zunächst viele mental nicht gewachsen zeigten".

⁴² James A. Andrews, "Pericles on the Athenian Constitution (Thuc. 2.37)", *The American Journal of Philology* 125, 2004, p. 542. See, also, Venier, "De Pericles A Sicilia", *ibid.*, p. 359: "En los dos primeros discursos (i, 140 y ii, 13), directo el primero, el segundo indirecto, Pericles alude a la situación en que se encontrarían los atenienses si entraran en guerra: no faltan hombres de mar y tierra, dinero ni experiencia, y hay razones para suponer que con esas ventajas saldrán vencedores, en especial porque los espartanos están en situación inversa. El tercer discurso (ii, 35), más conocido porque en él se honra a los primeros caídos en batalla (según cuenta Diódoro de Sicilia, xi, 33, 3, la tradición de escoger a un orador dotado para esta ceremonia se remontaba a las guerras médicas), comienza con un largo exordio que encomia la situación política de la Hélade, en especial su δημοκρατία, ejemplo para todos, porque se respeta lo individual y se cumple con lo público, "más que nada por un temor respetuoso, ya que obedecemos a los que en cada ocasión desempeñan las magistraturas y las leyes, sobre todo las que están legisladas en beneficio de los que sufren la injusticia, y en cuanto a las no escritas [las leyes naturales], si no se cumplen, traen vergüenza manifiesta a los que no las cumplen".

⁴³ Rachel Templer, "From Democracy to Empire: Transgression and Substitution in Thucydides' Periclean Narrative", *Polity* 47, 2015, p. 147: "In Thucydides' recounting of Pericles' funeral oration, the Athenian invites his audience to consider the connection between their city's democracy and its empire, and suggests that the latter was made possible by the former".

speaks directly about the *ἀρχή*, that is, he does not avoid talking about the Athenian Empire.⁴⁴ Closely related to the above is Pericles' remark, according to which the enemies of the Athenians claim to have defeated the whole army of Athens if they happen to win a battle against even a small group of well-trained Athenian soldiers. Therefore, the accomplished statesman notes that all Greek cities feel the highest honor every time they have to face Athens in battle.⁴⁵ However, the presence of Athenian imperialism becomes more conspicuous when Pericles avows that the enemies of Athens do not complain when the Athenians mistreat them, while the subjects of Athens do not consider themselves to be ruled by an unworthy city. In other words, Xanthippus' son believes that it is not immoral for one famous and powerful city to impose itself on another, vulnerable city, while the weak ought to feel honored when they are to be ruled by a high-powered empire. The Funeral Oration reaches its highest political climax when Pericles claims that Athens' achievements speak for themselves and therefore the Athenians do not need someone like Homer to praise their brave deeds.⁴⁶ Besides, Pericles adds that the Athenians have forced every state by land and by sea to submit to their fearlessness.⁴⁷ At this point we must turn our attention to the fact that the widely known politician deliberately offers exaggerating statements in order to boost the morale of the relatives of the deceased. However, Pericles' sayings reflect reality, place emphasis on the foundational principles of radical democracy and accurately describe the way in which Athenian imperialism was established.⁴⁸ Finally, the phrase *ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον τὴν τῆς πόλεως δύναμιν καθ' ἡμέραν ἔργῳ θεωμένους καὶ ἐραστὰς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς* (Thuc. 2.43.1), which calls the Athenians to love their city with passion,⁴⁹ reminds the scholar that in ancient Greek literature love (*ἔρως*) is often

⁴⁴ See Thuc. 2.36.1-3.

⁴⁵ See Thuc. 2.39.3.

⁴⁶ See Tobias Joho, "The Revival of the Funeral Oration and the Plague in Thucydides Books 6-7", *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 57, 2017, p. 33: «In contradistinction to the Athenians' eager imitation of epic models on the eve of the expedition, Pericles in the Funeral Oration had rejected the need of a Homeric singer, preferring the truth of the Athenians' actual achievement to the momentary delight of an epic poem (2.41.4). This emphasis on the priority of the factual over the fancies of the imagination is one of Pericles' central concerns».

⁴⁷ See Thuc. 2.41.2-4.

⁴⁸ For Pericles' justification of Athenian Imperialism see Ronald C. Lee, Jr., "Justifying Empire: Pericles, Polk, and a Dilemma of Democratic Leadership", *Polity* 34, 2002, p. 505-514.

⁴⁹ See Ryan Balot, "Pericles' Anatomy of Democratic Courage", *The American Journal of Philology* 122, 2001, p. 512. See also Mateo Duque, "Two Passions in Plato's Symposium: Diotima's to Kalon as a Reorientation of Imperialistic Erōs", in H. L. Reid and T. Leyh (ed.), *Looking at Beauty to Kalon in Western Greece. Selected Essays from the 2018 Symposium on the Heritage of Western Greece*, Iowa, USA: Parnassos Press 2019, p. 96-97: "We should remember the perilous context Pericles is in. He has been elected to speak in honor of those who have died in the war, but at the same time he needs to motivate the surviving Athenians—many forced to come inside the walls of a cramped city—to stay the course. Pericles is deftly combining a factual description of Athens with a normative prescription. On the one hand, Pericles is using figurative language to describe Athens's existing practice of pederasty, which helped to constitute its socio-political order. Social networks and connections were formed by the relationships between *erastai* and *erōmenoi*, they functioned as a process of political acculturation and socialization. On the other hand, Pericles also exhorts his audience; he holds out an ideal to them. He inspires the citizens to behold and love the city as one would a beloved. Pericles wants to harness the ambition, and drive in *erōs* that lives in every citizen, and to channel that collective energy toward a shared love object, Athens. All of it is in service to the war effort".

associated with tyranny.⁵⁰ In short, Pericles invites his fellow citizens to become lovers of Athens, so that the prestige of the city can be enhanced through the loyalty of its citizens. If we take into consideration that the Athenians are ready to die willingly for Athens' pride, then we suddenly come to grips with Pericles' view according to which Athens is unbeatable.

Pericles' third and final oration (Thuc. 2.59.2-2.64.6) was delivered in 430 B.C. The Peloponnesians have already invaded Attica twice and have destroyed the property of the Athenians, while the plague has left a heavy imprint on the health of the general population. Shortly afterwards, the Athenians remove Pericles from his office and decide to impose a fine on him; they are obviously angry due to the failure of his defensive strategy. This speech of Pericles was delivered before his political deposition, when he was still a general (*στρατηγός*). This oration highlights all of Pericles' rare rhetorical and intellectual gifts, since the acclaimed statesman knows how to calm his fellow citizens and give them courage. Indeed, the situation is extremely difficult for Pericles, since the Athenians have been forced to gather behind the city walls and watch the Spartans destroy their land while at the same time the plague rapidly devastates the Athenian population. The son of Xanthippus, being extremely eloquent and dispassionate, manages to convince his fellow citizens to make the right choices in every situation, without forcing them to act in a way that does not suit their temperament. The Athenians, in turn, are likely to disobey and may prefer to punish Pericles. Indeed, this is the case, but Pericles willingly obeys and pays the fine so that he is not deprived of his civil rights. The Athenian democracy is operating at the peak of its powers at this time, since those in office are recalled by the Athenian *demos* without protesting or feeling violated by the majority.

The idea of Athenian imperialism emerges when Pericles expresses the view that the Athenians are undoubtedly the absolute rulers of the sea⁵¹ on the entire earth and neither the Persians nor any other nation can resist their power. Pericles explicitly states that if the Athenians wish to conquer other nations in the future, they will do so with ease.⁵² Moreover, the famous politician points out that the Athenians ought to feel superior to the rest and this assumption is based on their military strength and not on hope which only leads to reckless behavior.⁵³ This phrase is very reminiscent of the warning that the Athenians addressed to the Melians, urging them not to rely on hope, which always misleads people towards disaster. Pericles explains here that the Athenians have no need for hope, because they possess robust knowledge. I take Pericles' statement to be somehow related to the intellectual ideal that the philosopher Anaxagoras had taught him, which was how to transcend superstition and interpret reality with the aid of science.⁵⁴ The great Athenian

⁵⁰ See, for example, Connor, *Θουκυδίδης*, *ibid.*, p. 299, n. 53.

⁵¹ See Simon Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, Vol. I, (New York: Oxford University Press 1991), p. 335-336.

⁵² See Thuc. 2.62.2.

⁵³ See Thuc. 2.62.4-5.

⁵⁴ See Plut. *Pericl.* 6.1: οὐ μόνον δὲ ταῦτα τῆς Ἀναξαγόρου συνουσίας ἀπέλαυσε Περικλῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ δεισιδαιμονίας δοκεῖ γενέσθαι καθυπέρτερος, ὅσῃν τὸ πρὸς τὰ μετέωρα θάμβος ἐνεργάζεται τοῖς αὐτῶν τε τούτων τὰς αἰτίας ἀγνοοῦσι καὶ περὶ τὰ θεῖα δαιμονῶσι καὶ ταραττομένοις δι' ἀπειρίαν αὐτῶν, ἣν ὁ φυσικὸς λόγος ἀπαλλάττων ἀντὶ τῆς φοβερᾶς καὶ φλεγμαινούσης δεισιδαιμονίας τὴν ἀσφαλῆ μετ' ἐλπίδων ἀγαθῶν εὐσέβειαν ἐργάζεται.

politician adds that currently the Athenians are not only fighting to defend their freedom, but also to protect and maintain their empire. At the same time, he admits that Athens can no longer afford to renounce the obligations that come with the possession of a hegemony:⁵⁵ the Athenian *ἀρχή* is exercised by the Athenians as a tyranny,⁵⁶ something which is, of course, unfair, but any indifference to it is extremely dangerous.⁵⁷ Pericles faithfully reflects here the famous philosophical doctrine of *πολυπραγμοσύνη* ("vigor" or "assertiveness", as Finley points out⁵⁸), according to which it is necessary for the Athenians to be in continuous motion. If the phrase is interpreted philosophically, then it means that the Athenians are like man himself, for whom it is crucial to constantly move in order to be able to prove that he is alive. Anything that remains still is dead. In short, if the Athenians are not constantly vigilant or become tolerant towards others, then their hegemony will soon be shattered by other powerful cities.

Pericles' line of argument is fully compatible with his past political mentality, especially if we take into consideration that the great statesman commanded his fellow citizens to destroy Aegina in 431 B.C.⁵⁹ Moreover, the

⁵⁵ See Thuc. 6.18.2-3. Alcibiades seems to adopt Pericles' views concerning the Athenian hegemony.

⁵⁶ We should note here that several comic poets accuse Pericles of ruling as a tyrant. See, for instance, Plut. *Pericl.* 3.3: τῶν δὲ κωμικῶν ὁ μὲν Κρατῖνος ἐν Χείρωσι, "στάσις δὲ" (φησί) "καὶ πρεσβυγενὴς Κρόνος ἀλλήλοισι μιγέντε μέγιστον τίκτετον τύραννον, ὃν δὴ κεφαλῆγερέταν θεοὶ καλέουσι," καὶ πάλιν ἐν Νεμέσει· "μόλ' ὦ Ζεῦ ξένιε καὶ καραϊέ." For a relevant commentary see Philip A. Stadter, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Pericles*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press 1989) p. 66: "Cratinus (F240 K. = 258 K.A., F111 K. = 118 K.A.): see the introduction, 3.1.e. Both the *Chirons* and the *Nemesis* concerned Pericles and contemporary politics under mythological guise. In both cases Pericles is Zeus (cf. also 13.10): in the *Chirons* he is the son of Cronus by Faction (instead of Rea) and a tyrant. Tyranny became a standard political slogan against Pericles' influence in Athens: see 16.1". Cf. Plut. *Pericl.* 7.1-4: ὁ δὲ Περικλῆς νέος μὲν ὦν σφόδρα τὸν δῆμον εὐλαβεῖτο. καὶ γὰρ ἐδόκει Πεισιστράτῳ τῷ τυράννῳ τὸ εἶδος ἐμφερὲς εἶναι, τὴν τε φωνὴν ἡδεῖαν οὖσαν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν γλῶτταν εὐτροχὸν ἐν τῷ διαλέγεσθαι καὶ ταχεῖαν οἱ σφόδρα γέροντες ἐξεπλήττοντο πρὸς τὴν ὁμοιότητα. πλούτου δὲ καὶ γένους προσόντος αὐτῷ λαμπροῦ καὶ φίλων οἱ πλεῖστον ἠδύναντο, φοβούμενος ἐξοστρακισθῆναι, τῶν μὲν πολιτικῶν οὐδὲν ἔπραττεν, ἐν δὲ ταῖς στρατείαις ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς ἦν καὶ φιλοκίνδυνος. ἐπεὶ δ' Ἀριστείδης μὲν ἀποτεθνήκει καὶ Θεμιστοκλῆς ἐξεπεπτώκει, Κίμωνα δ' αἱ στρατεῖαι τὰ πολλὰ τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἔξω κατεῖχον, οὕτω δὴ φέρων ὁ Περικλῆς τῷ δήμῳ προσέειπεν ἑαυτόν, ἀντὶ τῶν πλουσίων καὶ ὀλίγων τὰ τῶν πολλῶν καὶ πενήτων ἐλόμενος παρὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν ἦκιστα δημοτικὴν οὖσαν. ἀλλ', ὥς ἔοικε, δεδιὼς μὲν ὑποψία περιπεσεῖν τυραννίδος, ὁρῶν δ' ἀριστοκρατικὸν τὸν Κίμωνα καὶ διαφερόντως ὑπὸ τῶν καλῶν κάγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν ἀγαπώμενον, ὑπῆλθε τοὺς πολλοὺς, ἀσφάλειαν μὲν ἑαυτῷ, δύναμιν δὲ κατ' ἐκείνου παρασκευαζόμενος. εὐθύς δὲ καὶ τοῖς περὶ τὴν δῖαιταν ἑτέραν τάξιν ἐπέθηκεν. Cf. Fr. 348 K.-A. = 355 K.: ἀνελκταῖς ὀφρύσι σεμνόν. In antiquity the raised eyebrow was linked to anti-democratic sentiments. Even today, when we raise an eyebrow we usually want to express our disapproval of something.

⁵⁷ See Thuc. 2.63.2-3. Cleon also highlights that Athens rules as a tyrant, see Thuc. 3.37.2. This proves that all of Athens' great politicians just represent stages of Athenian imperialism. See, for example, A. G. Woodhead, "Thucydides' Portrait of Cleon", *Mnemosyne*^{Fourth Series} 13, 1960, p. 300: "Like the Melian Dialogue, Cleon's speech represents a direct and sensible, and in the circumstances properly drastic, implementation of accepted doctrine".

⁵⁸ See John H. Finley, *Thucydides*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1942) p. 127.

⁵⁹ Plut. *Pericl.* 8.7: οἷον τὸ τὴν Αἴγιναν ὡς λήμνην τοῦ Πειραιῶς ἀφελεῖν κελεῖσθαι. See Stadter, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Pericles*, *ibid.*, p. 108: "to remove Aegina, the pus in the eye of the Piraeus". Aegina probably did not join the Delian League at its foundation but in ca. 459 was made tributary after being defeated by Athens in a major sea battle and losing seventy ships (Thuc. 1.105.2, 108.4; cf. ML 33). After the peace treaty of 446 she remained in the empire, but her continuing complaints to Sparta supplied one of the motives for the war (Thuc. 1.67.2, 139.1). In 431, after the Spartan invasion, the Athenians removed the Aeginetans from the island and settled their own citizens

Athenians - following the military instructions of Pericles - occupied Hestiaea in 446 B.C. and expelled all the inhabitants from their homes.⁶⁰ The previous examples vividly demonstrate the callous attitude that Athens usually adopted towards the other Greek cities.⁶¹ Finally, directly intertwined with Athenian imperialism is the phrase *τὸ δὲ μισεῖσθαι καὶ λυπηροὺς εἶναι ἐν τῷ παρόντι πᾶσι μὲν ὑπῆρξε δὴ ὅσοι ἕτεροι ἐτέρων ἡξίωσαν ἄρχειν* (Thuc. 2.64.5). Those who aspire to exercise restraining authority over others are obliged to come to terms with the hatred that the weak cities will show towards them.⁶² In other words, Pericles implies that the Athenians ought to bravely accept their fate and continue to be the rulers of the other Greek cities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is necessary to stress that Athenian imperialism was not a political stage of democracy but was closely related to the highly innovative Athenian constitution. The Athenians pursued their foreign policy with unanimity and all agreed on the necessity of maintaining their hegemony at all costs. The Melian Dialogue, which stands as a representative example of the arrogance to which excessive power can lead, is not far from the views expressed by Pericles in his three speeches, which are preserved by Thucydides. Moreover, a connection between the Melian Dialogue and Athenian imperialism can also be made through Alcibiades, Pericles' nephew who had a significant influence on the Athenians in 416 B.C. and the years that followed. Alcibiades expressed the view that the strong ought to rule the weak and not set limits to their ambitions - beliefs which are obviously related to influences during his upbringing, namely Pericles. Of course, every text-

there (*Per.* 34.2; *Thuc.* 2.27.1). These words probably belong to the latter occasion, as they seem similar to Thucydides' explanation: *τὴν Αἴγιναν ἀσφαλέστερον ἐφαίνετο τῇ Πελοποννήσῳ ἐπικειμένην αὐτῶν πέμπαντας ἐποίκους ἔχειν*. The phrase was recalled for its forceful image: conjunctivitis was a common ancient disease, marked by a purulent discharge of the eye, sticking the eyelids together and impairing or blocking vision. The offending matter needed to be cleaned out (cf. *Non posse* 1101C, *δεῖ μὲν γὰρ ἀμέλει τῆς περὶ θεῶν δόξης ὥσπερ ὄψεως λήμην ἀφαιρεῖν τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν*). Aegina similarly inhibited the use of Piraeus. Plutarch quotes the phrase also at *Dem.* 1.2, and *Reg. et imp. apophtheg.* 186C and *Praec. ger. rep.* 803A, perhaps from *Arist. Rhet.* 3.10.7.1411a15-16. Our "eyesore" is now trite, and in any case has a different meaning, referring to an obvious blight external to the viewer. The expression is attributed to Demades in *Athen.* 3.99D; Strabo (9.1.14 [395]) says some applied it to the island of *Psytalia*".

⁶⁰ See *Thuc.* 1.114.3: *καὶ Ἀθηναῖοι πάλιν ἐς Εὐβοίαν διαβάντες Περικλέους στρατηγοῦντος κατεστρέψαντο πᾶσαν, καὶ τὴν μὲν ἄλλην ὁμολογίᾳ κατεστήσαντο, Ἑστιαῖας δὲ ἐξοικίσαντες αὐτοὶ τὴν γῆν ἔσχον*. Cf. *Plut. Pericl.* 23.4, *Ar. Vesp.* 715-716 and *Ar. Nub.* 211-213.

⁶¹ See also *Plut. Pericl.* 28.2: *Δοῦρις δ' ὁ Σάμιος τούτοις ἐπιτραγωδεῖ, πολλὴν ὠμότητα τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ τοῦ Περικλέους κατηγορῶν, ἣν οὔτε Θουκυδίδης ἰστόρηκεν οὔτ' Ἐφορος οὔτ' Ἀριστοτέλης· ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἀληθεύει ἔοικεν, ὥς ἄρα τοὺς τριηράρχους καὶ τοὺς ἐπιβάτας τῶν Σαμίων εἰς τὴν Μιλησίων ἀγορὰν καταγαγὼν καὶ σανίσιν προσδήσας ἐφ' ἡμέρας δέκα κακῶς ἤδη διακειμένους προσέταξεν ἀνελεῖν, ξύλοις τὰς κεφαλὰς συγκόψαντας, εἴτα προβαλεῖν ἀκὴδευτα τὰ σώματα*. We do not know for certain whether Pericles ordered the Athenians to tie the captives of Samos to boards for ten days and then break their heads with clubs, leaving their bodies lying around. In any case, no possible scenario can be ruled out. See Joshua P. Nudell, "Accustomed to Obedience? Classical Ionia and the Aegean World, 480-294 BCE" (Michigan: University of Michigan Press 2023), p. 50-53.

⁶² Cf. Alcibiades' views, *Thuc.* 6.16.5.

based disagreement is acceptable; some scholars could argue (citing Thucydides, especially 2.65) that Pericles exercised power wisely. A counterargument of this kind, however, is not compatible with the expansionist policy of Pericles, who, for example, treated the Samians with obvious cruelty during the Samian War. We should also remember that several comic poets accused Pericles of ruling as a tyrant. As much as these phrases are also related to the poets' habit of producing dynamic political opposition, we cannot in any way ignore them. This does not imply that Pericles was a tyrant, but that he was simply faithfully applying the doctrine of Athenian imperialism which he had inherited from his Athenian ancestors. In this way, the Melian Dialogue does not produce a "dissonant sound" in the ears of the well-informed reader, in the sense of not being incompatible with the liberal (and in many instances radical) tendencies of Athenian democracy; it simply confirms that the Athenians had invented a highly innovative constitution, which they were also putting into practice when they had to conduct their foreign policy. Pericles, then, was a democratic leader and simultaneously the mastermind behind Athenian hegemony. In this way, the preconception that a democratic state should universally and globally behave in a democratic way is refuted by the example of the Athenians. To sum up, behind the city walls the Athenian democracy resembled a garden full of fragrant flowers, but beyond the boundaries of their walls the Athenians were suddenly transformed into ruthless warriors. Perhaps this is the price of setting up and maintaining a hegemony and a direct democracy.

References

- Anastasopoulos Stavros Christos, *Φιλοσοφικές Καταθέσεις*, Athens: Pyrinos Kosmos Publications 2021.
- Andrews James A., "Pericles on the Athenian Constitution (Thuc. 2.37)", *The American Journal of Philology* 125, 2004, (p. 539-561).
- Archie Joseph Patrick, "Callicles' Redoubtable Critique of the Polus Argument in Plato's 'Gorgias'", *Hermes* 112, 1984, (p. 167-176).
- Balot Ryan, "Pericles' Anatomy of Democratic Courage", *The American Journal of Philology* 122, 2001, (p. 505-525).
- Bebedelis Georgios N., *Monism and dualism in Plato and the platonic tradition*, diss., Athens: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens 2023.
- Berman Scott, "Socrates and Callicles on Pleasure", *Phronesis* 36, 1991, (p. 117-140).
- Bornstein George, "Reading Thucydides in America Today", *The Sewanee Review* 123, 2015, (p. 661-667).

- Bosworth A. B., "The Humanitarian Aspect of the Melian Dialogue", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113, 1993, (p. 30-44).
- Boter G. J., "Thrasymachus and Πλεονεξία", *Mnemosyne*^{Fourth Series} 39, 1986, (p. 261-281).
- Boyarin Daniel, "Deadly Dialogue: Thucydides with Plato", *Representations* 117, 2012, (p. 59-85).
- Burns Timothy W., "The Problematic Character of Periclean Athens", in G. C. Kellow and N. Leddy (ed.), *On Civic Republicanism. Ancient Lessons for Global Politics*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2016, (p. 15-40).
- Castoriadis Cornelius, *Η Ελληνική Ιδιαιτερότητα, τόμ. Γ΄. Θουκυδίδης, η Ισχύς και το Δίκαιο*, trans. Z. Castoriadi, Athens: Kritiki 2011.
- Christodoulou Panos, "Thucydides' Pericles. Between Historical Reality and Literary Representation", in A. Tsakmakis and M. Tamiolaki (ed.), *Thucydides Between History and Literature*, Berlin: De Gruyter 2013, (p. 225-254).
- Connor Robert, *Θουκυδίδης*, trans. P. Daouti, Athens: Gutenberg 2022.
- Couch Herbert Newell, "Some Political Implications of the Athenian Plague", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 66, 1935, (p. 92-103).
- Craik E. M., "Thucydides on the Plague: Physiology of Flux and Fixation", *The Classical Quarterly* 51, 2001, (p. 102-108).
- Duque Mateo, "Two Passions in Plato's Symposium: Diotima's to Kalon as a Reorientation of Imperialistic Erōs", in H. L. Reid and T. Leyh (ed.), *Looking at Beauty to Kalon in Western Greece. Selected Essays from the 2018 Symposium on the Heritage of Western Greece*, Iowa, USA: Parnassos Press 2019, (p. 95-110).
- Emlyn-Jones C, "Dramatic Structure and Cultural Context in Plato's Laches", *The Classical Quarterly* 49, 1999, (p. 123-138).
- Finley John H., *Thucydides*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1942.
- Flew A. G. N., "Responding to Plato's Thrasymachus", *Philosophy* 70, 1995, (p. 436-447). Hadgopoulos Demetrius J., "Thrasymachus and Legalism", *Phronesis* 18, 1973, (p. 204-208).
- Greenwood Emily, *Ο Θουκυδίδης και η Διαμόρφωση της Ιστορίας*, trans. P. Chiotellis, Athens: Kardamitsa 2011.
- Harlap Shmuel, "Thrasymachus's Justice", *Political Theory* 7, 1979, (p. 347-370).

- Harris Edward M., "Pericles' Praise of Athenian Democracy Thucydides 2.37.1", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 94, 1992, (p. 157-167).
- Harrison E. L., "Plato's Manipulation of Thrasymachus", *Phoenix* 21, 1967, (p. 27-39).
- Hayward Alker R. Jr., "The Dialectical Logic of Thucydides' Melian Dialogue", *The American Political Science Review* 82, 1988, (p. 805-820).
- Hornblower Simon, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, Vol. I, New York: Oxford University Press 1991.
- Hornblower Simon, *Θουκυδίδης. Ο Ιστορικός και το Έργο του*, trans. A. Maniati, Athens: Tipothito, G. Dardanos 2003.
- Hourani George F., "Thrasymachus' Definition of Justice in Plato's 'Republic'", *Phronesis* 7, 1962, (p. 110-120).
- Jaffe S. N., "Walls of Wood and Walls of Stone: Themistocles as Architect of Empire", in N. Marinatos and R. K. Pitt (ed.), *Thucydides the Athenian*, Athens: Alexandria Publications 2022, (p. 19-46).
- Jang I. H., "Socrates' Refutation of Thrasymachus", *History of Political Thought* 18, 1997, (p. 189-206).
- Jenks Rod, "The Sounds of Silence: Rhetoric and Dialectic in the Refutation of Calicles in Plato's Gorgias", *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 40, 2007, (p. 201-215).
- Joho Tobias, "The Revival of the Funeral Oration and the Plague in Thucydides Books 6-7", *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 57, 2017, (p. 16-48).
- Kallet Lisa, "Thucydides, Apollo, The Plague, And The War", *The American Journal of Philology* 134, 2013, (p. 355-382).
- Kassel Rudolf and Austin Colin, *Poetae Comici Graeci*, Vol. 1-8, Berlin: De Gruyter 1983-2001.
- Katsimanis Kyriakos, "Ο πλατωνικός Καλλικλής υπό το φως του Θουκυδίδη", in M. Skortsis (ed.), *Γ' Διεθνές Συμπόσιο για τον Θουκυδίδη: Δημηγορίες*, Athens: Sideris I. 2006, (p. 80-101).
- Kerferd George B., "Plato's Treatment of Calicles in the 'Gorgias'", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*^{New Series} 20, 1974, (p. 48-52).
- Klosko George, "The Refutation of Calicles in Plato's 'Gorgias'", *Greece & Rome* 31, 1984, (p.126-139).

- Konstantakos Ioannis M., “La campagna di Serse contro la Grecia: mito poetico e pensiero storico, da Eschilo a Erodoto”, in G. E. Manzoni (ed.), *Il mito, il sacro, la patria dei poeti. Le radici identitarie dell’Europa a 2500 anni dalle guerre persiane*, Milano: Edizioni Studium 2021, (p. 62-94).
- Lateiner Donald, “Nicias’ Inadequate Encouragement (Thucydides 7.69.2)”, *Classical Philology* 80, 1985, (p. 201-213).
- Lee Ronald C., Jr., “Justifying Empire: Pericles, Polk, and a Dilemma of Democratic Leadership”, *Polity* 34, 2002, (p. 503-531).
- Lehmann Gustav Adolf, *Perikles. Staatsmann und Stratege im klassischen Athen*, München: Verlag C. H. Beck 2008.
- Liebeschuetz W., “The Structure and Function of the Melian Dialogue”, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 88, 1968, (p. 73-77).
- MacArthur W. P., “The Athenian Plague: A Medical Note”, *The Classical Quarterly* 4, 1954, (p. 171-174).
- Macleod Colin W., “Form and Meaning in the Melian Dialogue”, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*^{4thQtr.} 23, 1974, (p. 385-400).
- Maguire Joseph P., “Thrasymachus - or Plato?”, *Phronesis* 16, 1971, (p. 142-163).
- Monten Jonathan, “Thucydides and Modern Realism”, *International Studies Quarterly* 50, 2006, (p. 3-25).
- Murray Williamson, “Thucydides: Theorist of War”, *Naval War College Review* 66, 2013, (p. 30-46).
- Nash John, “Sea Power in the Peloponnesian War”, *Naval War College Review* 71, 2018, (p. 119-139).
- Nicholson P. P., “Unravelling Thrasymachus’ Arguments in “The Republic””, *Phronesis* 19, 1974, (p. 210-232).
- Nielsen Donald A., “Pericles and the Plague: Civil Religion, Anomie, and Injustice in Thucydides”, *Sociology of Religion* 57, 1996, (p. 397-407).
- Nudell Joshua P., “Accustomed to Obedience? Classical Ionia and the Aegean World, 480-294 BCE”, Michigan: University of Michigan Press 2023.
- Page Dennis L., “Thucydides’ Description of the Great Plague at Athens”, *The Classical Quarterly* 3, 1953, (p. 97-119).
- Romilly Jacqueline de, *Ο Θουκυδίδης και ο Αθηναϊκός Ιμπεριαλισμός. Η Σκέψη του Ιστορικού και η Γένεση του Έργου*, trans. L. Stefanou, Athens: Papadimas 2000².

- Seaman Michael G, "The Athenian Expedition to Melos in 416 B.C.", *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*^{4th Qtr.} 46, 1997, (p. 385-418).
- Sparshott F. E., "Socrates and Thrasymachus", *The Monist* 50, 1966, (p. 421-459).
- Stadter Philip A., *A Commentary on Plutarch's Pericles*, Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press 1989.
- Stauffer Devin, "Socrates and Callicles: A Reading of Plato's "Gorgias"", *The Review of Politics* 64, 2002, (p. 627-657).
- Sykoutris Jean, *Εκλογή Έργων*, Athens: Kaktos Publications 1997.
- Templer Rachel, "From Democracy to Empire: Transgression and Substitution in Thucydides' Periclean Narrative", *Polity* 47, 2015, (p. 147-174).
- Venier Martha Elena, "De Pericles A Sicilia", *Foro Internacional* 51, 2011, (p. 356-364).
- Wassermann Felix Martin, "The Melian Dialogue", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 78, 1947, (p. 18-36).
- Welton W. A., "Thrasymachus Vs Socrates: What Counts as a Good Answer to the Question 'What is Justice'?", *Apeiron* 39, 2006, (p. 293-318).
- Wilson J. R. S., "Thrasymachus and the Thumos: A Further Case of Prolepsis in Republic I", *The Classical Quarterly* 45, 1995, (p. 58-67).
- Woodhead A. G., "Thucydides' Portrait of Cleon", *Mnemosyne*^{Fourth Series} 13, 1960, (p. 289-317).